









THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

By

ROBERT BYRON WILLMS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

SCULPTURE

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SUMMER 2004




**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

Submitted by Robert Byron Willms in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2024 with funding from  
University of Alberta Library

<https://archive.org/details/Willms2004>

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

**RELEASE FORM**

NAME OF AUTHOR: ROBERT BYRON WILLMS

TITLE OF THESIS: FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS GRANTED: MASTER OF FINE ARTS

YEAR THIS DEGREE WAS GRANTED: 2004

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis, and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.





**DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN**

**GRADUATE STUDIES**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,  
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE
Nose Shadow	2004	Welded Steel, primer	6'x7'x5'





**Robert Byron Willms**  
**Rusting Sculpture**

**Selected excerpts from the Oral Examination:**

“I believe the sculptures installed in *Rusting Sculpture* to be self-declaratory, not requiring further explanation.”

“Words of further explanation fail to express the realities of the sculpture with more clarity than does an experience of the art itself.”

“There are few rules limiting my choices in the studio but in a particular moment and at my discretion one option may be deemed better than another.”

“‘Ritual anew,’ or ‘always new, all the time’ might be appropriate working mottos.”

“The sculptures are scatological evidence of the ideas and experiences that I have digested.”

“The works are inseparably enmeshed in the complexity of their mutating environment – this is the primary reason for the title of the exhibit: *Rusting Sculpture*.”

**An Artist Statement under construction:**

Mr. Willms seeks a certain self-critical ahistoricity within his studio practice, emphasizing a new-every-time response to the methods and materials at his disposal while constantly adapting to the change and progress that necessarily accompany their use.

Mr. Willms believes that art, and particularly sculpture, can act as specific visual evidence of a non-cliché engagement within the web of relationships that gives shape to his environment.

Mr. Willms considers a pursuit for personal integrity to be key in creating such value-laden sculpture: crucial for discerning without fallaciously quantifying the same; and a prerequisite for ingenuous conveyance of his relational experiences, whether haptic or aesthetic, emotive or cognitive.

Mr. Willms deems sculpture to be a suitable medium for making qualitative judgments about his life experience – invisible judgments, occurring involuntarily otherwise, are reified and made tangible by the sculpting process.

Mr. Willms recognizes within integrity-oriented sculpture the possibility for a real-life-relevance which resists and, potentially, transcends the current materialistic, individualistic and scientific fashions of his society.

Mr. Willms anticipates that relationships affected by his creative exploration (person-person, person-thing, person-idea; hence, person-environment) will be as grassroots: shifting people’s understanding of society and consequently, though imperceptibly, transforming it as well.

Mr. Willms acknowledges the changeable and corruptible nature of these principles, not to mention the slipperiness of the words that embody them; they are declared neither with manipulative intent nor as rhetorical consumables but are rather a loose justification of further relational exploration.







SHAUGHN BUTTS, THE JOURNAL

Robert Willms has set up a show of 12 of his large-scale steel sculptures outside of the University of Alberta's Corbett Hall.

# Out standing in the field

*Talented U of A graduate aims to make his steel sculpture as accessible and spontaneous as possible*

## PREVIEW

### Robert Willms' Rusting Sculpture

**Showing at:** The front (east) lawn of the University of Alberta's Corbett Hall, corner of 112th Street and 82nd Avenue.  
**Until:** July 24

Gilbert Bouchard



Sculptor Robert Willms is outstanding in his field.

Heavy-handed pun aside, it's his work that's standing in the sprawling field fronting the University of Alberta's Corbett Hall, the reputedly haunted former home of Studio Theatre.

The talented metal sculptor has just opened his graduate exhibit of work, a show of 12 large-scale mild steel, welded work called *Rusting Sculpture*.

"This is the first outdoors graduate sculpture show in memory," says the 34-year-old artist, pleased with the red tape-cutting ceremonial support that he's received from the university staff for the unusual project.

"It was a little nerve-racking setting the show up in that we had only one shot at installing the work. This really was no easy feat given the size of the pieces."

The dozen abstract metal sculptures were eventually arranged in an irregular pattern, flanking both sides of one of

the two lengthy paths cutting across the gently terraced field to Corbett Hall's impressive main entrance.

Despite their modern pedigree, the elegant, gravity-defying feel of the undulating, organically shaped pieces have a slight topiary feel to them, making the show appropriate for the historic and formally kept grounds they are temporarily occupying.

As for the title of the show, Willms decided to make reference to the reality of working with metal and his decision not to treat or paint the surface of his work.

"Obviously the pieces are being acted upon by the environment and are reacting at the molecular level on the surface—they're rusting—but they're also interacting with the users in the space."

For Willms, the show embodies many seemingly contradictory levels of "static and active," including the viewing reality of the space.

Many folks make their way to the field to leisurely sit or lie in the sun, giving them a laid-back relationship to the sculpture, while others will only glance at it quickly as they walk up the path to Corbett Hall.

Another contradiction Willms grapples with is built into the very nature of the steel he's cutting, welding and pounding into shape.

"You don't expect such a solid materi-

al to exude such an ethereal quality, but it's really a very malleable and immediate medium to work with," he says.

While Willms chooses to work with scrap industrial mild steel, he prefers that the origins of the material not be evident to the viewer. "With steel you can obliterate any and all marks and joins altogether."

Despite the size and bulk of the work, Willms displays a surprising level of spontaneity in the creation of the pieces, trying to work as much "in the moment" as is possible.

"I start with two interesting pieces that are joined together in an interesting fashion. This start still gives me an infinite array of possibilities and then it's just a matter of dealing with the relevant moves that are the most appropriate in that range of options."

Willms also wants the work to be as accessible as possible to a general audience and likes to use humorous titles for the work. One piece that looks like a person about ready to release a bowling ball is actually called *The Bowler*.





# BESTEST OF EDMONTON

late and amaretto. (KH)

## Bestest Jasper Avenue garden

It might be a little hard to see from the street, but small garden has sprouted up on the overhang at New City. While it's no Butchart Gardens, it's a nice creative use for an empty space that would have just sat there until someone could figure out a way to make it a patio—presumably in the year 2525. Thankfully, this tiny, potted plant-filled enclosure will fill in that time and bring a small dose of tranquility to the ever-busy lounge and a little touch of nature to the ever-paved Jasper Ave. (JE)

## Bestest perching steps

Although loitering is greatly frowned upon, it's a pastime everyone enjoys from time to time. With Slurpee in hand and some good conversation... um... in mouth, the steps in front of Chianti's on Whyte Ave and 105 Ave are a great place to spend an afternoon. Assessing the crowds in a well-shaded spot and indulging in allegedly witty repartee with friends, why waste money on flat patio beer when unoccupied steps, benches, curbs and railings literally force you to experience the streets? (AF)

## Bestest place to meet an online dating partner for the first time

The Grant Notley gazebo at the top of Victoria Park Road. If the person turns out to be a dud, you can "go get something you forgot in your car," marked by LeMarchand. If things look promising, there are a number of good coffee shops and restaurants close by. And if you're both there for no other reason than to bump uglies, the discreet river valley is right there for your recreational needs. (KH)

## Bestest area for a romantic evening walk on the north side

If you venture into the Castle Downs suburb on Edmonton's mythical northern half of the map, you can find Beaumaris Lake. It's artificial, but nice vegetation and trees surround it so that it creates a private atmosphere and not just some rich guy's private pond. A lengthy walkway surrounds it, complete with lamps and plenty of make-out benches if you shoo the ducks away. Plus, Beaumaris Lake is one of the few places you can go where you and your sweetie won't be interrupted by a searchlight from Edmonton's Air-1 helicopter looking for street racers. (CH)

## Bestest thing to do with a lady-friend at four in the morning on a pleasant winter's night other than sex

What could possibly be more romantic than a spontaneous, wee-hours, early morning trek out to City Hall to take your loved one skating on the pond? With no one else around to bother you, you've got that peculiar pyramid, the monolithic clock tower and other redundant architecture setting a techno-Egyptian atmosphere, and just you and your girl cutting figure eights in the moonlight. To be honest, I don't know if this is, strictly speaking, a legal activity. But it's such a beautiful way to end off an evening that until I'm told otherwise in a clear, definite manner, I'm going to continue to indulge in it whenever possible. (DP)

## Bestest place downtown to bust out the (medical) marijuana

By the wooden steps leading into the river valley, just south of the hotels and the apartment blocks, there's a grassy little knoll. It's close to the downtown bars, and it has a really fantastic view of the valley and the south side. It's on a steep embankment which gives it the feel of a private natural amphitheatre. The mood is hard to describe, except it makes me

Edmontonian. But am I so freakishly far outside the range of normal human bodies that Edmonton Transit can't design a seat big enough to accommodate me? Instead, I must bend my legs at an angle so extreme that there's barely room for even the most pixielike fellow passenger to sit next to me. I worry that it's only a matter of time before ETS starts treating me like those overweight airline passengers in the

how they just appeared one day, too, as if they had rained down from the heavens. Doesn't that thunder god wield a hammer? (JS)

## Bestest animal kingdom moment

We're on 105A St, just south of 76 Ave, and stop to watch an enormous flock of Bohemian waxwings convene for a feed of berries in a stand of trees. Suddenly, in a cloud of wings, hun-

secret, it seems, is an open book. (AM)

## Bestest stumbling home drunk path

Everyone probably has their own special route home, but how many of them make you feel as if you've wandered completely out of the city? Well, the small paths on the university farms offer you a chance to wander through what feels like a very small rural back road without having to navigate any confusing wood-filled ravines (or evade any murderous hillbillies). While only a small number of people get to enjoy this experience (and who do will hopefully respect the university's request not to interfere with anything and thereby ruin the route for everyone else) it's a small pleasure that lets you get away from streetlights, cars and other drunks. (JE)

## Bestest place to get chilly on a hot day

The shady side at Commonwealth Stadium. No matter how hot it gets on a summer day, the swirling breeze makes sitting in the shadows a brisk experience. Veteran Eskimos fans know to always bring a jacket, even on the sunniest of summer afternoons. (SS)

## Bestest place to imagine yourself as Spider-Man

That'd be the southeast corner of the City Centre at 101 St and 102 Ave. For one thing, City Centre's the cheapest and most convenient place to see *Spider-Man*, and once you're done it's the only real spot in town you can emerge from the movie and look up to see a skyscraper or two. We don't have a lot of web-slinging locales in this town but if you stand on that street corner, your head full of whips, you can easily fire some imaginary webbing up at semi-towering Manulife Place, swing over to Edmonton Centre, do a couple of ooh-ahh-inspiring spins around Scotia Place before getting enough air to maybe make it to the Chateau Lacombe or the IPL tower before having to plunk imaginarily down on top of a bus to make it out to West Ed to fight the Lizard. Or maybe *Mysterio*. (SN)

## Bestest place for hot and risqué outdoor sex

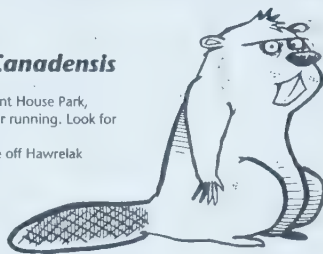
If you've got a hankering for some sweaty outdoor sexposure during our brief summer months, then please don't go to Grandview Point overlooking the Quessnel Bridge. Not only does it offer a great view at night, but it's also relatively hidden from the nearby houses and offers a good view of anyone coming up the stairs from below. Complete with a wooden bench/look-out that offers more Kama Sutra position possibilities than splinters, the place is definitely *sexcellent*. So don't go there. I don't want to see the sweaty imprints of anyone else's ass cheeks when I go for my own mid-night romps. (JE)

## Bestest videogame parlour

Remember how your parents used to warn you to stay out of the arcade? Remember when you thought games like *Dragon's Lair* and *Pole Position* were perfect reasons to blow 10 bucks in quarters? Well, if you miss the old vintage games, Edmonton International Airport is still filled with 'em. A myriad of the classics are there... after all,

## Bestest place to find *Castor Canadensis*

The river valley path, west of the parking lot in Government House Park, where the noisy food van sometimes sits with its generator running. Look for a brave little beaver on the grass at the top of the hill. Honourable mention: the north side of the walking bridge off Hawrelak Park, home to a large dam. (KH)



think of childhood, in the country, surrounded by beauty in a quiet place where you can really enter into a state of mind that these days usually only comes from mild self-medication. A truly fantastic, mellow location for reclining with good friends to partake in some innocuous illegal activities—not hurting anyone, mind you—and not get bothered by cops or panhandlers or idiots with obnoxiously loud cars or stereos. A place where you can just chill out and shoot the shit. If and when, of course, you have a legal doctor's prescription to partake in such activities. (DP)

U.S. and charge me for two fares every time I climb on board. **Runner-up:** the Varcona Theatre, who a couple of seasons ago installed dozens of plush new seat cushions that I'm sure most audience members find very comfy indeed but which force me to spend two hours with the edge of the seat in front of me rammed up into the soft flesh just beneath my kneecap. (PM)

## Bestest display of public art

Every spring, there was a tear in my beer for all the metal sculptures relegated to what my friends and I dubbed

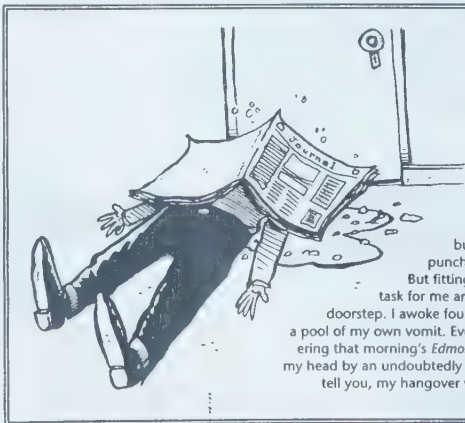
dreds of chattering birds take off. We see a merlin flying away with a waxwing in its talons. Following it down the block, we see the merlin perched in an evergreen, glaring at us. (Later, when recounting the story to a friend over beers, I describe how a merlin swooped in and snatched its prey. Flying killer fish—next year in the Bestest of Edmonton.) (DR)

## Bestest sanctuary

The Clifford E. Lee Bird Sanctuary is an out-of-the-way little park on the outskirts of Edmonton—so close that you

## Worstest newspaper delivery experience

It remains my most embarrassing memory in all my years of living in Edmonton. Uncharacteristically drunk, having downed a fifth of vodka in record time at a friend's party, it was up to me to navigate the seven blocks back to my own apartment at 3 a.m. Somehow I found my building. Somehow I got into the elevator and punched the correct button to get me to my floor. But fitting the key into my lock proved too complex a task for me and I elected instead simply to pass out on my doorstep. I awoke four hours later, mortified to find myself lying in a pool of my own vomit. Even more embarrassing, however, was discovering that morning's *Edmonton Journal* had been tactfully placed beside my head by an undoubtedly disgusted Journal deliveryperson. And let me tell you, my hangover was the stuff of international headlines. (PM)



## Bestest motorcycle day trip

Beaumont for breakfast, down to Camrose for coffee and bookstore browsing, across to Calmar for ice cream, north to Devon and a walk around the Gardens, back to Edmonton in time to park at the Tim Horton's on Whyte Avenue and exchange after-market equipment tips. Rebel by avoiding Groat Road. (KH)

## Worstest anti-tail seat design

I'm about 6'5", which I admit makes me significantly taller than the average

"the sculpture graveyard" outside the Fine Arts Building on the U of A campus. More than a few times I debated requesting one of the monstrous metal figures for my front yard, reasoning that the asking price by that point would finally fit my budget. (Plus, a half-ton hunk of tortured steel, nicely positioned amidst my front-lawn grove of dandelions, would superlatively declare my mettle to the neighbourhood.) So it was with much delight that I noticed that the lawn of Corbett Hall is the new gallery for the welded monoliths. I like

can still hear the hum of the city wafting in through the trees. But when I'm there, surrounded by marshes, I feel as if I were on some secluded island. It's the place I always went to clear up the stressful issues that cropped up in my life. Then, one day, I went for my little pilgrimage and was disheartened to find a few cars parked at the entrance. "Never mind," I thought. "I won't know them anyway." But, walking down the paths, I ran into not one, not two, but three local artists who had come there separately for the same reason. My little





# RESTING SCULPTURE - ROBERT BYRON WILLMS

(MFA TUESIS EXHIBIT  
JUNE 24 - JULY 24)

→ BUFFALO SHOULDER

→ THROAT OF AN ARMED

→ STANDING REMAINS

(#14) → LADY FINGER

(#15) → ABERRATION CORRECTION

(#16) → THE BOWLER

→ PLONK SHARKS & PUNKING HOOKS

→ TORTOISE AND SNAIL

→ PAPER DOLLS

→ NOSES HAD

→ CUTBUCKLE

→ BUX-O-MITE

for info  
contact Rob:

431-0541 or

chab@telusplanet.net

N





# Rusting Sculpture

Robert  
Byron  
Willms

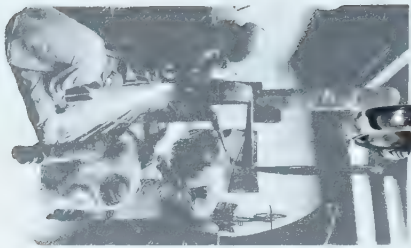
Opening  
Reception  
Thurs, June 24  
7 pm - 10 pm

Corbett Hall East Lawn

University of Alberta (112 St & 82 Ave)

Exhibit runs June 24 - July 24





# Rusting Sculpture

Robert Byron Wilms

University of Alberta (112 St & 82 Ave)

## opening reception

Thursday, June 24, 7 pm – 10 pm

"We  
they  
not  
to  
you  
will  
modern  
the  
to  
cultural  
art  
original  
the  
work."

Question

Answer

welded steel 6'x7'x5"  
Robert Byron Williams

books

4  
wn

welded steel 8'x4'x3"  
Robert Byron Williams

Correction  
Rel

# Disruptive

Robert Byron Wilms

June 24 - July 24, 2004

Corbett Hall East Lawn

University of Alberta



(112 St & 82 Ave)

# Opening Reception Thursday June 24, 7 - 10 pm

opening reception music by Mark Templeton

The artist gratefully acknowledges the support of the following:

The Alberta Foundation of the Arts

Black Riders Design

Leva Cappuccino Bar

Professor Peter Hide

For more info contact Rob: [ahab@telusplanet.net](mailto:ahab@telusplanet.net)



Robert Byron Willms  
Rusting Sculpture  
Slide List

***Rusting Sculpture.***

MFA Thesis Exhibit 2004.

UA Corbett Hall East Lawn.

1. 12 welded steel sculptures; aerial view from the NE.
2. 12 welded steel sculptures; view from the East.
3. ***Paper Odalisque, Tortoise & Snail***, exhibit sign/map.
4. ***The Bowler, Aberration Correction.***
5. ***Buffalo Shoulder, Throne of One Armed, Standing Remains.***
6. ***Buffalo Shoulder***, welded steel: 5'x5'x3', 2003-4.
7. ***Throne of One Armed***, welded steel: 7'x4'x4', 2003-4.
8. ***Standing Remains***, welded steel: 8'x4'x3', 2003-4.
9. ***Ladyfinger***, welded steel: 7'x6'x3', 2004.
10. ***Aberration Correction***, welded steel: 8'x4'x3', 2001-4.
11. ***The Bowler***, welded steel: 10'x3'x3', 2003-4.
12. ***Plowshares & Pruninghooks***, welded steel: 9'x9'x11', 2003-4.
13. ***Tortoise & Snail***, welded steel: 3'x9'x3', 2003-4.
14. ***Paper Odalisque***, welded steel: 8'x9'x5', 2003-4.
15. ***Cutbuckle***, welded steel: 4'x10'x4', 2003-4.
16. ***Nose Shadow***, welded steel: 6'x7'x5', 2004.
17. ***Bux-o-mite***, welded steel: 9'x5'x4', 2004.



